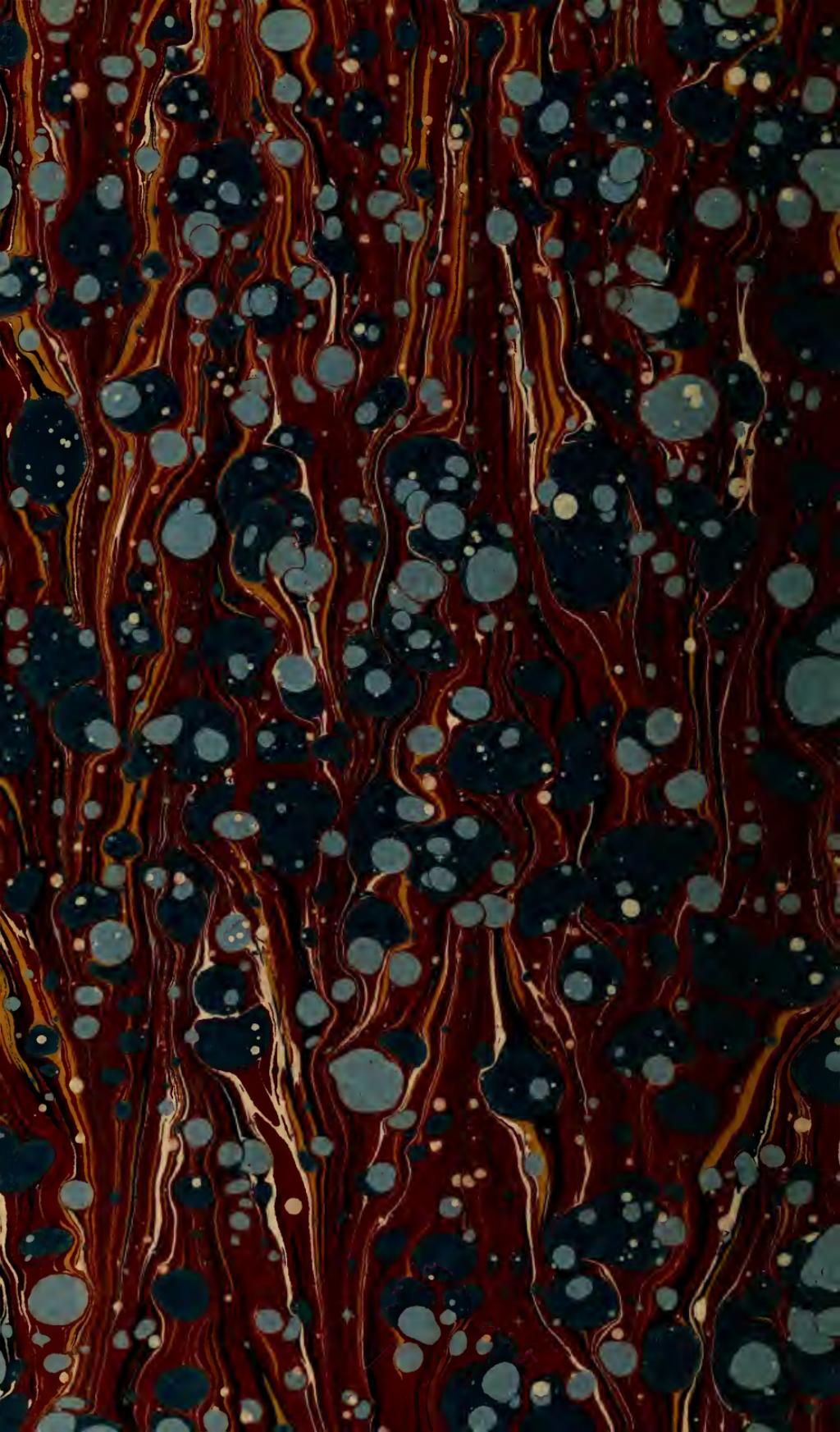
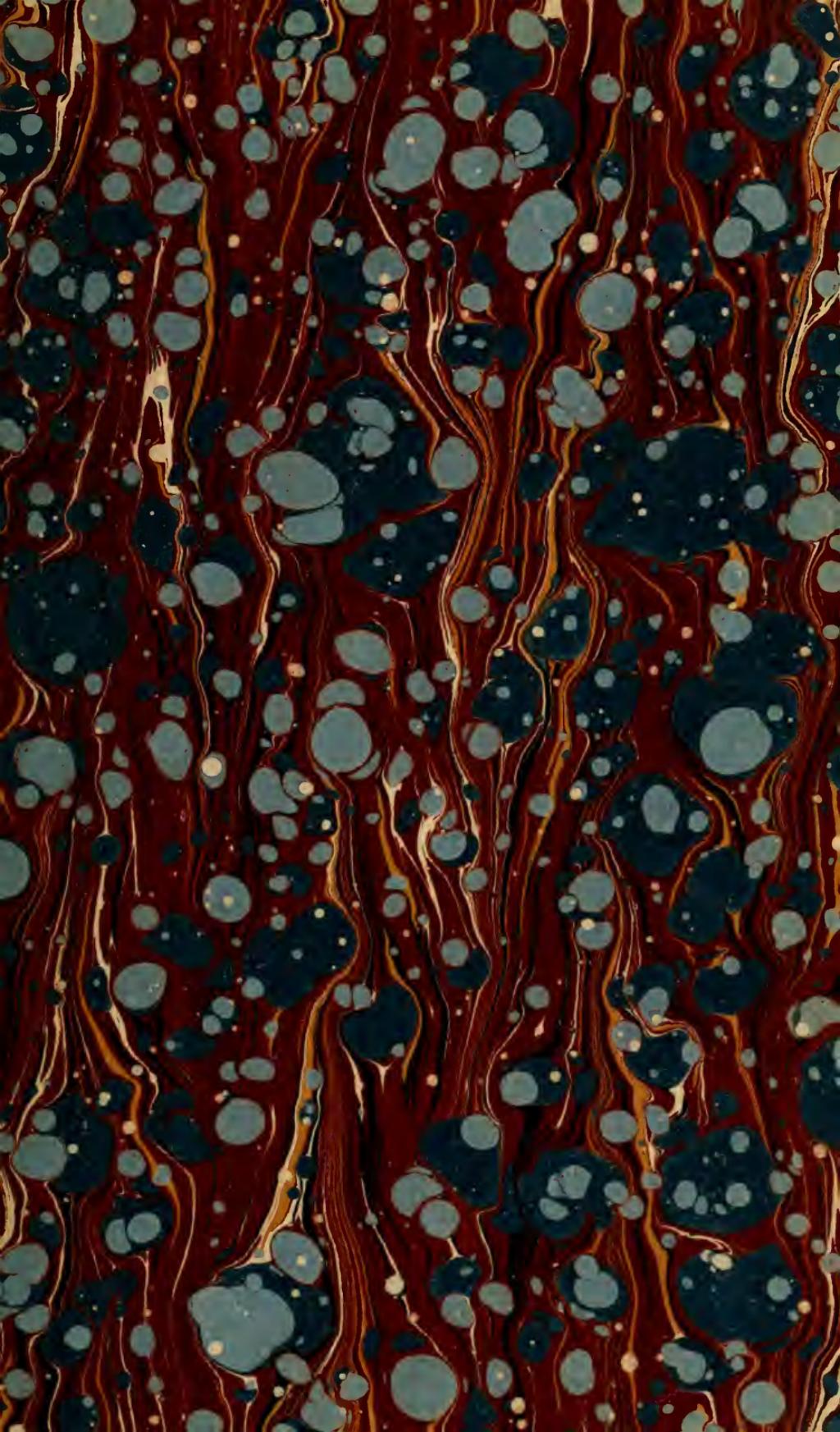


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THE
ANTISEPTIC VAULTS

OF

S. Michan's Church, Dublin.

BY

ARTHUR VICARS, F.S.A.

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INTERIOR OF ONE OF THE VAULTS AT S. MICHAEL'S, DUBLIN

(From a Photograph by Magnesium light, taken by W. Vibond, Esq.)



AN ACCOUNT
OF THE
ANTISEPTIC VAULTS

BENEATH

S. MICHAEL'S CHURCH, DUBLIN,

Read at the Annual Meeting

OF

THE ROYAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND IRELAND, AT LEAMINGTON,

BY

ARTHUR VICARS, F.S.A.

“Te moneant, Lector, tot in uno funera libro,
Tempore quod certo tu quoque funus eris.”
—WEEVER.

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THE ANTISEPTIC VAULTS

OF

S. Michan's Church, Dublin.



I PROPOSE to give a short account of the vaults under S. Michan's Church, Dublin, which display peculiar antiseptic properties for preserving the bodies. These furnish, I believe, considering the circumstances, an unique instance; and if we take into account the peculiarly damp nature of the Irish climate—"humid" as our physical geographers call it—which accelerates the process of decay and decomposition, it is the more to be wondered at.

S. Michan's Church is situated on the north of the river Anna Liffey. It is doubtful if there exists any of the original church. It is a cruciform structure, in a sort of a semi-classical style of last century, of the plainest possible description, with a fine old tower at the west end, with graduated battlements. This tower presents the appearance, to my mind, of having undergone a partial, if not total, rebuilding; possibly in 1686, at which date it was restored, as appears by an inscription over the west door.

The church was founded in the year 1095, by Michanus, said to be a Danish bishop, and there is a recumbent effigy, occupying a niche in the south wall, in the church, of a bishop in alb, chasuble, and mitre, holding a pastoral staff. This is supposed to represent the founder. It is of granite, but has been whitewashed over.

Before treating of the vaults, it may be interesting to mention that there is a tradition that the organ in this church is the one on which Handel first played his Messiah. Though I do

not like to upset such a nice old tradition as this, I feel bound to say that it is devoid of foundation. By the "Memorial Book" of the parish I find that the organ was built by Cuvillie, in 1724, and the same source gives a full specification of it.

It is well known that Handel paid his first visit to Dublin in 1742, and performed his *Messiah* in the Fishamble-street Music Hall, now long since pulled down. An organ there was in the room on which Handel played, which we learn from a letter from Handel to Jennens. But as the organ now in S. Michan's is the same as that erected by Cuvillie, in 1724, it is quite impossible that it could have been in Fishamble-street for Handel to have played his *Messiah* on it. However, as it was the finest organ in Dublin for many years, it is quite probable that Handel did actually play on it in S. Michan's.

The organ case is finely carved with fruit and flowers, also the gallery in front of it with musical instruments. The church plate mostly dates from the seventeenth century, though there is one silver-gilt chalice the base of which might possibly be pre-reformation.

Having said this much about the interior of the church, I shall pass on to the vaults, of which there are five. They are entered from the outside on the south side, and for the most part extend across the entire width of the church. Two are under the nave; one small one, consisting of a single chamber, under the south transept; another extending from transept to transept; and the fifth, called the chancel vault, from being situated beneath the chancel.

The entrance to the first vault, beginning at the west end, as in the case of all the others, is protected by massive iron doors placed in a slanting direction against the wall, and on these being swung back a flight of steps is disclosed to view. Descending the nine steps, we come into a long arched passage 37 feet long, 5 feet 6 inches wide, and 8 feet 10 inches high. Off this passage are four arched entrances to the right and left, each 3 feet 2 inches wide, and 5 feet 4 inches high. Unlike our sensations in most other vaults, a warm feeling is perceptible on entering the place, accompanied by a dry stone-and-mortar sort of smell, which tells one at once of the absence of all damp. I have heard some liken the smell in these vaults to that of mustard. Entering the chamber on our left, which contains some twenty coffins of the Beard and Stitt families, we come upon a curious spectacle. On one side is a pile of coffins, out of one of which the whole side has fallen, and there is displayed to view the body of a man in a perfect state of preservation, his flesh presenting a brown, leathery sort of appearance. He rests on hay—all that remains of the upholstery of the coffin. And

some hay still clings to the sides; but all signs of the lining, or shroud of the corpse, have disappeared.

The next chamber is that of the Osborne family, as appears by the arms on the iron gate—Quarterly ermine and az. a cross engrl. or. This vault contains six coffins, which, contrary to custom, are placed nearly upright and leaning against the wall. There is a legend in connection with this family, that this is the way they have buried their members for many generations in order to facilitate their answer to the last summons. All the coffins in this vault appear to be of this century.

The next chamber is a mass of confusion—coffins in various stages of dilapidation, lying about on top of one another in every position. Here is shown the body of a man with a piece of crape, now red from age, tied over his eyes. The sexton holds that this is a sign that he was hung, which is not at all improbable, for we know that S. Michan's was situated close to the old Newgate or prison of Dublin, and the parish had a right of burying malefactors who had been put to death, and got very large fees for it, too. The brothers Sheares, the rebels of 1798, who were hung at Newgate, are buried in S. Michan's vaults; and Robert Emmet, another rebel, is said to lie in the church-yard, as also some other less important offenders. The last coffin was brought into this chamber in 1840.

We next come to the Mac Dowell and Neilson vaults, and on the opposite side, as we return, those of Ferguson, Rev. J. H. Monahan, Precentor of Christ Church Cathedral, and Archer. In the last named we see where a coffin has collapsed from the superincumbent weight of two more modern ones. This state of things we saw once or twice in our inspection of the place, and in some cases the result is anything but edifying, as the pressure causes the bodies to protrude, and the spectacle of emerging arms, and legs, and tufts of hair, present a very awful appearance. The last chamber on our left is that lately appropriated by Canon Marrable, formerly rector of this parish. I hope it may long remain in its present unoccupied condition.

The next vault is that in which the subjects of our photograph lie. It is the second from the west-end, and is entered like the last, than which it is somewhat smaller, the passage being 29 feet 6 inches in length. On the left-hand side are two chambers with doorways, respectively 5 feet 4 inches by 3 feet 2 inches. The first one is a very large vault belonging to the family of Hamilton, of Abbotstown, Co. Dublin, and contains, according to the sexton, some forty coffins all seemingly in a good state of preservation. The other chamber is the one, the interior of which our photograph gives a represen-

tation: it is only 11 feet by 8 feet, and 8 feet 10 inches in extreme height, and, like all the others, is arched. This chamber contains altogether ten coffins, two on the left, four on the right, and four in the centre without lids. The centre one contains the body of a lady brought here about the year 1790. All these have once been covered with black velvet, some of which still hangs on the sides in strips. It is a popularly received idea that these bodies are several hundred years old, and people go even so far as to say that the body of a man with his legs crossed in the coffin nearest the wall is a crusader. The absurdity of this wild notion is obvious when we look at the coffins, which we have reasons for thinking are the original ones in which the bodies were first placed. They are of the ordinary shape of the present day, of which I believe I am correct in stating one of the earliest examples known is that of Lancelot, Bishop of Winchester, buried in 1626 in S. Saviour's, Southwark, whose coffin was discovered in 1830 (*Gent.'s Mag.*, Aug., 1830, p. 171). Everyone knows now that the cross-legged crusader theory is long since exploded. There is not much to guide one in guessing the date of the coffins in S. Michan's, but I should scarcely think that there are any prior in date to about the end of the seventeenth century, if indeed so early; the greater number are much later than that. We were informed by the sexton that in another of the vaults, some years ago, he saw "E. Rook, 1690," marked in nails on the lid of a coffin of a child. The lock of this vault being out of order we were unable to visit it, though I have since had this statement corroborated by another; but whether or not my informants mistook the 1790 for 1690 will, however, never be ascertained, for the coffin in question has since fallen to pieces. I don't remember, however, having seen any dates on my previous visits. At all events, whatever their dates may be, the coffins must certainly have been here many years, and quite long enough to set people wondering how it is that time and the usual process of decay seem to have had no effect on them.

The appearance of these four bodies is similar to all those that we saw, and is weird and wonderful in the extreme. The flesh has, as in the other cases, assumed a dark and leathery appearance, though the pores of the skin, as also the features, are discernible, the "abdominal walls" are elastic on pressure, and the fingers can be moved independently of each other, and it is very probable that the other joints of the body are equally pliable. The hair is not preserved on any of the bodies that we saw. The hand that may be discerned resting over the edge of the coffin in the background was so placed in order to show it in the photograph. The right hand of the female figure in the

centre coffin is missing, and the wrist presents an appearance as if it had been cut off, possibly by some vandal of a tourist.

The bodies seem to have undergone practically no change since a rather fanciful account of them was written in 1832, in *The Dublin Penny Journal*. I subjoin an extract, as the work in question is by no means easily to be met with in England :—

“ Underneath this ample church extend long narrow galleries, on either side of which are the vaults, not much larger than common coal-vaults, in which the coffins are placed. Some, which are the private property of individuals, are fastened up with wooden or iron doors, others are open ; and into one of these the sexton led us, candle in hand. I confess that, on inspecting the contents, I was greatly disappointed. I had read Brydone’s description of a subterraneous catacomb in Sicily, which has the property of drying up the bodies of those enclosed in it, and in which those dead centuries ago are still standing in their niches, the same in form and feature as when alive, and clothed in the attire and ornaments belonging to their sex. If I did not anticipate exactly the same here, I at least expected, from report, to see dried and preserved specimens of the human form ; but if ever there was a shocking, revolting, melancholy representation of what ‘man that is mortal’ may come to, it is here. In a common tomb or vault, after a few years have gone by, nothing remains but the remnants of the coffin and the bones ; everything belonging to the child of dust has returned to its dust, except what may mark the place as a Golgotha—a place of skeletons and skulls. But here death is, as it were, making a mockery of mortality, leaving flesh in rags and tatters, and allowing skin, muscle, and cartilage to remain, so in the most appalling way to humble human pride, and show what man’s gallantry and woman’s beauty may become when it is preserved, as it is here, half skeleton, half mummy. The transition state between preservation and decay was most horrible to look on. There lay a large man, whose head was on one side, either so placed in order to fit into his coffin, or else (the idea is fearful) he had come to life in his narrow cell, and, after horrible contortion, had died for want of air. The skin on the head, the cartilages of the nose, the cellular substance of the legs, the capsular ligaments of the joints and fingers, were all preserved ; but oh, the torn, worn, tattered skin !—just like decaying, discoloured parchment, exhibiting all the colours belonging to the slowest possible decay—blue, green, and yellow—the mildew and mouldiness of a century. Never will the image of that ghastly specimen of decay be effaced from my memory.”

I need hardly remark that the foregoing account is rather coloured. The author's imagination seems to have led him astray when he speaks of the man who he thinks was buried alive, on the ground that his head slightly inclined to one side. This is evidently the body depicted so clearly in the photograph. I was also unable to detect the "blue, green, and yellow" tints, or any appearance that would suggest the slightest action of damp.

The teeth in the skull, placed in the background, show the gold wire still holding some of them together.

Before leaving this vault I was curious to see if the anti-septic properties extended to the coffins which had not from age as yet exposed their contents. So we raised the lid of the one on our left, which did not seem to be fastened down. It was with feelings akin to awe we gazed on the confusion that reigned inside:—there, amidst a heap of rubbish, and what appeared to have once been part of the upholstery of the interior, lay the body of a man in exactly the same condition of preservation, and presenting a similar appearance to the one in our photograph. The sides of one of the coffins in this vault were loose, and necessitated our placing them upright before photographing, hence the somewhat irregular shape it presents.

I am indebted to Mr. W. H. Vipond Barry, an amateur photographer, for the photograph done by means of magnesium wire; and, considering the surrounding difficulties, it gives one as clear an idea as could be desired of the interior of one of these chambers.

The next vault we visited is the largest of them all, and extends from one transept to the other, the central passage being 70 feet long, 5 feet 4 inches wide, and about 9 feet high. Passing on our right the vaults of the White family, and those of the Rev. Charles Stanford, Prebendary of S. Michan's, 1846, and Prebendary Abbot—in the last named of which there is that fearful debris and confusion which seems to make such a mockery of the sadness of death—we come to the family vault of the Earls of Leitrim, the entrance to which is protected by a large wooden door. By placing the candle opposite a hole in one side of the door, and looking through another, we get a view of the interior, which contains some twelve coffins, including that of the late Earl, who was murdered in Donegal some few years ago. Most of the coffins in this chamber are covered with velvet; and the sexton informed us, that on the burial of the late Earl, the velvet on the surrounding coffins was found to be perfectly free from damp, another proof of the dryness of these vaults. The silver-gilt coronets on the coffins reflected the rays of the candle in a strange way about the gloomy interior.

The adjoining vault belongs to the Viscounts Monek. It is curious that the interior of this chamber should present some signs of decay, and all within a space of about three years, due, I believe, to the following facts:—A short time ago a coffin was disinterred from the churchyard, and brought into the Weir vault (situated opposite the Monek vault), after having been in the ground some years. As a result, all the coffins in the chamber became covered with a white film of mildew, and the appearance, a year ago, was truly remarkable, and indeed beautiful, all the coffins in this vault being enveloped in what resembled a coating of snow. The coffin from the churchyard is supposed to have introduced damp—an element foreign to this place—which worked its way across the passage to the Monek vault, and there did the havoc that we saw, besides causing such debris in the Weir vault itself. The damp, however, seems to have almost entirely expended itself, and been stopped by the peculiar nature of the place, for as I write all signs of mildew have disappeared, and only the walls of this particular chamber show any moisture.

On our way out we pass the vaults of the Wilson, Brereton, Sankey, and Putland families, and a vault belonging to no family in particular, containing human remains in a most shocking state of disorder, due to the collapsing of the coffins, and presenting the appearance of a regular charnel-house.

This was very much the condition of most of the vaults until some years ago, when a former rector had the debris collected and placed in the chamber under the vestry, the entrance to which, now blocked, is at the termination of the west-end vault.

Before leaving we must notice the coffins of the brothers Sheares, the rebels of 1798, in the last chamber next the entrance. When first buried here they had no leaden coffins, and in process of time, when the wooden coffins went to pieces, the bodies were exposed to view. And it seems that many years ago someone stole the head of John Sheares for a wager; and great was the wonderment caused at the time by its sudden disappearance. But through the agency of the late Dr. Madden, M.R.I.A., it was restored, and the remains of both brothers placed in lead and oak coffins in 1853. The outer coffins are now fast decaying, the lids having disappeared, and the sides show signs of going to pieces.

The chancel vault we did not visit, for we found it impossible to turn the key of the iron doors. We were told, however, that it contained nothing of interest beyond “a gentleman with an orange sash around him.” The roof of this vault extends beyond the present chancel several feet, which may, in some

degree expose the interior to the elements and account for the fact that the bodies in this vault are not nearly so well preserved as in the others, the vault being much more damp than the rest. In the chancel vaults are buried, amongst others, the Morgan Croftons and Percivals.

I noticed in some of the chambers of these vaults webs of most gigantic proportions, forming huge curtains over the gloomy surroundings. In one chamber the web must have been at least 10 feet long, and as wide as the chamber itself. The sexton told us he had *seen* one of these spiders, which he described as being of large size, and black in colour. He has been anxiously looking out for one to capture to send to a naturalist, who is curious to examine one. I do not see what the spiders would have to live upon (unless, as his theory is, that they feed on the dead bodies around them), for I saw no sign of life whatever.

The first question that will suggest itself to one on seeing these vaults will naturally be, To what can be attributed these extraordinary phenomena?—for there is no question as to the bodies being embalmed, since some of them have been comparatively recently placed here.

There are many theories put forward as to the peculiar nature of these vaults. One is, that it is due to the tannin in the earthen floors of the vaults, as the ground on which S. Michan's is built was anciently a vast oak forest, and not very long ago known as Oxmanstown Wood. Certain it is that the floor of the vaults does not show the slightest sign of damp, but, on the contrary, is of a pale yellow earth, fine and dry.

There is an old record which states, “The faire green or commune, now called Ostmontowne Green, was all wood, and hee that diggeth at this day to any depth shall finde the grounde full of great rootes.” (*Vide* also Hanmer's *Chronicle*.) This would go to support the Tannic theory just propounded. It is said that, in 1098, William Rufus got permission from Murchad, King of Leinster, to procure wood for the roof of Westminster Hall, from these woods. This was possibly the roof pulled down in the year 1397. I have heard it suggested that the preservative properties are to be attributed to the magnesian limestone, of a yellow colour, of which the vaults are partially built, and that it absorbs the moisture.

The following extract by a well-known chemist of Dublin, appeared in a Dublin journal some sixty years ago:—

“The bodies of those a long time deposited appear in all their awful solitariness—at full length—the coffins having mouldered to pieces; but from those, and even the more recently entombed, not the least cadaverous smell is discoverable;

and all the bodies exhibit a similar appearance, dry, and of a dark colour. It is observable of animal matter in general, that in common cases, from the action of the external air, or its own reaction, putrefaction results; but when placed in a temperature not exceeding 32°, the septic tendency is considerably counteracted, as the preservation of the mammoth in the iceberg would sufficiently prove. In this instance, it appears that the action of the fluid was interrupted by cold. Now, if the action of the inclosed fluid was altogether destroyed, as is the case in the salting of meat, it is plain this would also contribute to counteract the septic tendency: whence it follows, that it is the moisture which gives life to the putrefactive ferment. Now, the floor, walls, and atmosphere of the vaults of S. Michan's are perfectly dry; the flooring is even covered with dust, and the walls are composed of a stone peculiarly calculated to resist moisture. This combination of circumstances contributes to aid nature in rendering the atmosphere of those gloomy regions more dry than the atmosphere we enjoy. Further, it appears that in none of the bodies deposited here are any intestines, or other parts containing fluid matter, to be found, having all decayed shortly after burial."

Another theory is that of Sir Charles Cameron, F.R.C.S., Vice-President of the Institute of Chemistry of Great Britain and Ireland, and Medical Officer of Health for Dublin, which, from the eminence of the propounder, I shall give in full.

His theory is that the peculiarities of these vaults are due partly to their undoubted dryness, and partly to the great freedom of their atmosphere from dust. Being anxious to ascertain by experiment whether or not the fermentation of unstable infusions of organic matter would take place as readily in these vaults as elsewhere, he, in the summer of 1879, set about making the following very interesting experiments, the details of which he has kindly furnished me with:—

"An infusion of melon in distilled water was prepared; a portion of it, evaporated to dryness, left a solid residue amounting to 0·84 per cent. This liquid was introduced into eighteen of Tyndall's tubes, and the contents of the tubes were sterilised. This process was effected in the following manner:—The tubes were immersed for half an hour in a paraffin bath heated to 380° Fahr., and whilst at this temperature their orifices were sealed by means of the gas blow-pipe. It was concluded that by this treatment the spores or ova of any organisms that might have existed in the infusion were rendered incapable of further development. The tubes were kept intact for a week. On the second day the contents of two of them became very slightly clouded, and on the sixth day quite opaque from an abundant

development of mycelium. It was clear that the contents of these tubes escaped being sterilised. The contents of the remaining tubes were perfectly clear. On the seventh day four of the tubes were opened by breaking the ends of their long narrow necks, and the air of the laboratory allowed full access to them. In two days their liquid contents became clouded, and in about a week's time they became so thick that they could not be poured out.

"On the eighth day the remaining twelve tubes were arranged in a stand, and placed in one of the vaults of S. Michan's Church. The rector, the Rev. Mr. Long, kindly entrusted to me the key of the vault, which I kept until the completion of the experiment. I selected one of the driest of the vaults. My *modus operandi* in depositing the tubes was as follows:—I opened the door of the vault as gently as I could, and passed gently into the portion most remote from the door, and I remained as motionless as I could for a space of about twenty minutes; I then lighted a spirit-lamp, and having heated a pincers in the flame, I nipped the necks of ten of the tubes, so as to expose their contents to the air. I then emerged from the vault as quietly as I possibly could. The slowness and gentleness of my movements were, of course, with the object of disturbing the air of the vault as slightly as possible.

"No person entered the vault after this procedure until six weeks had elapsed, when, on the day of 13th August, 1879, it was again invaded by myself. On this occasion I was accompanied by Dr. E. Lapper, Lecturer on Chemistry in the Ledwich School of Medicine. We removed the tubes to the open air, and examined them. In five of them the contents were very opaque and mucilaginous. The contents of the remaining seven tubes were quite clear, and exhibited no signs of fermentation. Two of these tubes had remained sealed. These tubes were conveyed to the Laboratory of the Royal College of Surgeons, where, in the course of a few days, their contents became turbid and mucilaginous. I hesitate somewhat in drawing any positive conclusion from this experiment. The results certainly show that an organic infusion remained without undergoing fermentative changes for a period of six weeks during warm weather. What was the cause of this stability? It was clearly not due to the air of the vault being dry, for the object preserved was a liquid. It is evident that germs from the air found their way into these tubes through their narrow necks. The air then was not quite free from floating germs. On lofty situations in Alpine regions Tyndall found the air so pure and free from dust, that organic liquids exposed for months to the air remained unfermented. It may be that the air in the vaults of S. Michan's Church is

very free from dust, and that it is owing to this cause that organic matter does not freely decompose in them. I am disposed to believe that, in the case of dead bodies, the dryness of the air is a factor in the preservation of the bodies. A coffin containing a body was removed from the soil of a graveyard, and deposited in one of these vaults. It was soon covered with large masses of moulds. After a while the damp coffin became dry, and in process of time the moulds, the natural habitats of which are damp situations, disappeared."

I think that no one can help remarking, on entering these vaults, the clear and dry feeling of the atmosphere of the whole place, and to this, along with the absorbing property of the stone, some feel disposed to attribute the dessicating properties; the situation of the vaults under the church, and the construction of them being calculated to resist the damp outside.

I have been unable to learn of any similar phenomena existing in any other vaults in our country, though by the kind assistance of Mr. Hartshorn, I am able to draw your attention to one or two places abroad where something of a similar nature seems to exist, though I am far from attributing to these the same antiseptic peculiarities that exist at S. Michan's; for, unlike S. Michan's, these places are not open to proper scientific investigation (to say nothing of the money made by showing them), and for aught I know may be preserved by artificial means.

In Rome, beneath the Capuchin church of S. Maria della Concezione are four mortuary chapels, the walls of which, filled with niches, contain the ghastly remains of, it is said, upwards of 4000 friars of past generations. Each corpse is buried in a tomb, professing to contain earth from Jerusalem of peculiar antiseptic properties, and after having lain there till the tomb is "wanted" for another deceased member of the order, it is dug up and placed in an appointed niche. I believe, however, that only the toughest bodies will stand the resurrection process and hold together. From the ceiling are suspended skulls and baskets formed of ribs and bones, and other portions of the human frame, the walls being decorated in fantastic, not to say cheerful, patterns which seem to make a mockery of death. The bones that are unsuitable for these purposes are cast into a general ossuarium. On All Souls' Day these vaults are lighted up and visited by numbers of the outside world, and I believe these visits are a source of considerable income to the monks. The lucrative results render the ease, in an antiquarian point of view, somewhat doubtful.

Mr. Brydone, in his tour through Sicily and Malta, 1777, gives a very lucid and descriptive account of the well-known vaults at Palermo, which, from their resemblance to those of

S. Michan's in Dublin, I shall here subjoin. He says (vol. ii., p. 107) :—

“ This morning we went to see a celebrated convent of Capuchins about a mile without the city ; it contains nothing very remarkable but the burial place, which indeed is a great curiosity. This is a vast subterranean apartment divided with large commodious galleries, the walls on each side of which are hollowed into a variety of niches, as if intended for a great collection of statues ; these niches, instead of statues, are all filled with dead bodies, set upright upon their legs, and fixed by the back to the inside of the niche ; their number is about three hundred ; they are all dressed in the clothes they usually wore, and form a most respectable and venerable assembly. The skin and muscles, by a certain preparation, become as dry and hard as a piece of stock-fish ; and although many of them have been here upwards of two hundred and fifty years, yet none are reduced to skeletons ; the muscles, indeed, in some appear to be a good deal more shrunk than in others, probably because these persons had been more extenuated at the time of their death. Here the people of Palermo pay daily visits to their deceased friends, and recall with pleasure and regret the scenes of their past life ; here they familiarize themselves with their future state, and choose the company they would wish to keep in the other world. It is a common thing to make choice of their niche, and to try if their body fits it, that no alteration may be necessary after they are dead ; and sometimes, by way of a voluntary penance, they accustom themselves to stand for hours in these niches.”

Like those at Rome, the bodies at Palermo all seem to undergo a “process” before being placed in their final resting-place, and in that respect are not worthy of comparison with those at S. Michan's. I have heard of the catacombs of the Grotto of Calypso, in the island of Malta, containing dried mummies of monks, but of these I have no particulars, nor of those at S. Michael's Bordeaux, which contain some fifty bodies said to have been dug up from the churchyard surrounding the church, on its being closed about the end of last century, and to have been preserved owing to the antiseptic nature of the ground that they had been buried in. The charge for admission to see these bodies is half a franc. Possibly there are others coming more under the same category with those in Dublin, which I have not heard of.*

* Since writing the above, Dr. Frazer, M.R.I.A., has called my attention to the existence of a vault at Bremen Cathedral, which prevents decomposition ; a proof of which is afforded by the dried poultry suspended in it some years ago. This cellar or vault is above ground, though without windows or access to the outside air.

One can only make conjectures as to the probable causes of the phenomena observed in these vaults, but it would be interesting to compare the soil and surrounding circumstances of the vaults of S. Michan's with vaults elsewhere which have a similar reputation, in the hope of finding some dessicating and preservative property common to all. I consider it to be more a question for a scientific man than for an antiquary, so I have done no more than "clear the air" from tradition and legendary accounts attaching to these vaults, and to gather matter, which it is to be hoped some scientific authority may make use of with a view to elucidating what appears to be still a mystery. In conclusion, I express my thanks to Mr. Hartshorn, F.S.A., for much information cordially given, and also to Mr. Thomas Drew, M.R.I.A., Architect to the Chapter of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin; Sir Charles Cameron, F.R.C.S. ; and to the Rev. T. Long, Rector of S. Michan's, for his courtesy in permitting me to make such a thorough examination of the vaults under his charge.

THE END.

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